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SOUTHERN LEADERSHIP SINCE THE CIVIL WAR.

BY GARLAND GREEVER.

THE attention of the country has of late been arrested by the action of sundry Posts of the Grand Army of the Republic in demanding with no little vehemence that the statue of Lee be excluded from the hall of the nation's celebrities at Washington. Similar but less stringent protests emanated from the same quarter a few months ago when the State of Mississippi presented to the battleship named in her honor a silver service which was stamped with the likeness of Jefferson Davis. The two incidents, while containing nothing, to be sure, that need cause alarm, are not without significance. Among thinking classes in the North they are likely to produce only two results: a mild inquiry whether the Government would be justified technically in accepting the gifts, and a languid regret that old wounds are not healed. In the South, however, we can hardly expect that they will be so lightly dismissed; for they indicate a tendency, which would seem to be rather strongly marked, to ignore the advice of such men as ex-President Roosevelt and President Taft—a tendency to consider the achievements and the spirit of the South as in no sense forming a part of our national heritage.

As a Southerner myself, and the son of a captain in the cavalry of the Southland, I am naturally a trifle reluctant to admit that the term "Confederacy" is synonymous with "villainy" or "treason." I am also a bit skeptical as to the inherent and absolute wrongness of the conservative and the superlative rightness of the progressive when contentions arise through which "the old order changeth," for I have a fleeting suspicion that if the former may become an "old foggy" the latter may become a

"fire-eater"; and I am ditto as regards the Cavalier and the Puritan. The truth is I am not an extremist on either side; for it has been my good fortune to have my ideas moulded to a large extent by my father—a man who, as he was not afraid of the testing of issues by the sword, was likewise manly enough to accept without bitterness the result of the struggle. It has been instilled into my mind that the victors in the war between the States were generous, and that, whatever virulence or contempt remained, it was not shared by any large number of those who had themselves smelled powder. This opinion I have had somewhat rudely shattered at times. I have heard Federal soldiers say that they had no wish to "shake hands and make up"; and I know of one Federal soldier, whose complaint of a business need for funds had been answered by my father with a courteous proffer of a loan, who afterwards declared in private to a friend that he "didn't want any of the damned old rebel's money." While such instances tend to rouse the ire, I have always taken them as exceptions that prove the rule that in the North at least, where there are few traces of the dreadful aftermath of the conflict, there is little resentful feeling. Yet, according to newspaper accounts, General Frederick D. Grant was either present without actively participating or near at hand without commenting unfavorably afterwards when a resolution was passed urging in wrathful terms the rejection of Lee's statue—a charge that without further evidence I refuse to believe against the son of the magnanimous conqueror. In recent weeks, however, I have seen in a letter published without editorial condemnation in a reputable magazine an angry reference to Lee (and through him to every Southern soldier) as a traitor; and still more recently I have read that a Grand Army Post has paired Lee off, not with Lord Falkland or the Shakesperean Brutus, but with Benedict Arnold. But it is not, after all, in the envenomed utterance, but rather in the public complacency that permits it, that I see a menace to justice and the South. An aggressive unreason will defeat itself, whereas there may dwell a dangerous perversion in that national habit of thought which is slowly and unconsciously acquired. I have, therefore, no wish, now or ever, to speak harshly of any of the people of the North; I reserve my reproaches for the hotheads of my section. I would simply inquire whether, germinant and growing north of Mason and Dixon's Line, there is not

a disposition more hurtful than the mere hostility of a few. I would ask if this is not the time to determine whether further adjustments can proceed only on the basis of a relinquishment by the South of all her traditions—a time to elicit from sober-minded citizens in the North that “sweetness and light” which their hasty and, more pertinently, their indifferent neighbors are inclined to violate.*

It would be wearisome and useless to thresh over the questions as to whether the South had a right to secede and whether her attitude toward human servitude was grossly wrong. With regard to the former question, I believe that fair-minded men in the North are willing to concede that, judging by the letter of the Constitution and the intentions of its framers, the South had the better of the argument; while fair-minded men in the South admit that the logic of Calhoun, though it was unanswerable, was nevertheless refuted by the national idea of Webster. With regard to the second question, I believe that impartial minds in the North will confess that the South was by no means solely responsible for the inception of the traffic in slaves, and that Southern efforts toward manumission were checked and chilled through the jealousies aroused by the clamorous abolition movement; while the saner element in the South will refuse to deny the moral and economic benefits that have accrued to their section from the emancipation. Seen thus, the Civil War and the sufferings it entailed are irresistibly tragic—a gory illustration of the way in which discord and mutual distrust mar that “manifest destiny” which we are prone to picture as gently guiding the world. The two sections could not amicably continue a union which both had established through sacrifice, nor could they perform together a deed of mercy which either would have done alone. Against this sombre background we must judge the subsequent conduct of the South. Whether her course in antebellum days was a perfect one is not of the slightest consequence. Two points we should bear in mind: that her course was entirely

* Since writing the above I have seen two encouraging tokens. The Northern press has condemned the sweeping anti-Southern utterances of Senator Heyburn of Idaho, and has generously lauded the broad-spirited valedictory of Senator Gordon of Mississippi. The one incident would indicate that the Northern partisan, like the “professional Southerner,” has no place in the civilization of the future; the other would indicate that the thing now needed is an exposition of Southern sentiment at its best.

sincere, and that it was not the anomaly of history in that it was wholly mistaken. We should realize the human element; we should remember that the present is not to be judged independently of the influence of the past; we should understand that when the strife was over Southerners were face to face with the gloomy problem of adapting themselves to a condition in which they had not believed and which fate, not apostasy, had impelled them to resist.

To a problem so stupendous as this, who in the South has brought the most charitable spirit, the largest outlook, and the noblest solution? With what leadership of lower conceptions has his spirit been forced to combat? In the ultimate light of history, how should his labor be judged?

I should unhesitatingly say that the man who most fully exemplifies the loftiest leadership of the South since the war is the man the censure of whom calls forth this article, the man who when others despairingly cried, "O Lord, revive thy work *in the midst* of the years" saw his way clearly as by inspiration. Robert E. Lee was not only the consummate flower of the Old South; he is also the beacon and prophet of the New.

Out of the agony of our civil conflict rose two men who in moral stature and insight into affairs were almost superhuman—Lincoln and Lee. Between them was a remarkable contrast. Between them was a remarkable likeness. Both were natives of the South; but in the world-old struggle bequeathed from England one became the champion of the Puritan, the other the embodiment of the Cavalier. Lincoln was the child of shiftless parents; Lee was the best-born man in America. Lincoln was homely, and often at first sight gave offence; Lee was handsome, and never failed to command admiration. Lincoln forged through harassing adversities, that he might mount and uplift; Lee refused emoluments and honors, that he might stoop and serve. Lincoln hailed the outcome of the contest, "With malice toward none, with charity for all"; Lee greeted it with the manly statement, "I believe it is the duty of every citizen, in the present condition of the country, to do all in his power to aid in the restoration of peace and harmony." Lincoln, in the hour when his spirit triumphed, was defeated in body; Lee, at the time when his body was defeated, triumphed in spirit. If we subscribe to the plea of Lamar, "My countrymen! *know* one another and

you will *love* one another," we should earnestly study the soul of Lincoln and the soul of Lee.

It is a deplorable fact and a sad commentary on mortal dereliction that neither of these men has been adequately appreciated even in the section whose cause he upheld. In the name of both mischief has been wrought that is far from the spirit of either. Of the two I think Lee is the more misunderstood. Nay, I believe that if the American people would repair their greatest neglect of the legacy derivable from a single character in their history they would have to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the real nature of Lee. That nature is amply set forth in the "Life and Letters" edited by his son, a book not to be surpassed as a quiet teacher of patriotism. And the period most worthy of emphasis—the one which is generally overlooked—is that in Lee's life which followed the collapse of the Confederacy.

There is no wish on my part to imply an apology for the years preceding. Lee's record in the military service of the United States was altogether honorable. So efficient was it that, as every one knows, at the beginning of the war he could have had the command of the Northern armies. To set aside the personal glory he could thus have won was no hardship to a man of his character, but as the hours dragged on and the struggle drew nigh he felt "the burden of the mystery," "the heavy and the weary weight" of a momentous national crisis. He knew as few did how much was involved. To secession he had been opposed; but to take up arms against his brethren in the South was also an evil from which he shrank. Graphically has the historian pictured the tumult of his spirit when he was driven to a choice. Pacing up and down the veranda of his home at Arlington, he looked across the Potomac where floated upon the Capitol at Washington the flag of his country; then, turning his face toward Virginia's fields, he heard the voice of a mother. His decision was made through the whispered word "duty"—"the sublimest word," he has called it, "in our language." Of his courage and genius through the years of arduous battle I need not speak. It should never be forgotten that if his knightly soul bore the shadow of resentment, it was only towards those whose reckless rancor had brought on the conflict. He once declared, "I have fought against the people of the North, but I have never cherished towards them bitter or vindictive feelings, and I have never seen

the day when I did not pray for them." But high-minded and vicarious as he had been throughout, he did not reveal the fulness of the unsullied grandeur of his character until he turned his steps homeward from Appomattox.

What was the course upon which he embarked—the course which our American people are inclined to ignore in making their estimate of him? That his procedure was right will be the more obvious if we consider just here two other types of leadership that have flourished in the South since the war.

The first type is represented by Thomas Dixon, Jr., the author of "The Leopard's Spots." It is rabidly reactionary; it sweepingly condemns whatever is not of the South, Southern. Its food is an outworn animosity; its appeal is to instincts of revenge; its aim is to reverse the processes of time, to foment discord, and to engender bitterness. Let me say that it is inexpressibly harmful to the South. It furnishes an earth-clog that fetters the most liberal undertakings; it makes whole communities as the man

"Who, born for the universe, narrow'd his mind,

And to party gave up what was meant for mankind";

it makes the demagogue strong in the approval of mobs that are won by the sophistries that sound like truth rather than by truth itself. Yet, filled with blind hatred as it is, it is a logical outcome of the disasters that the South underwent. How extreme these were few Northerners can realize. I myself have before my eyes every Sabbath morning a symbol of them; for in the church where I worship are memorial tablets inscribed with the names of the pastors who successively ministered to the flock, but the space for the years '64 and '65 is as bare and blank as death. A Northerner who had moved to this section once said to me: "When I came here, I heard casually that on the approach of raiders in war time people buried their treasures in earth. I said to myself, 'Fools! what made them do that?' Then the thought came to me: 'Great God! In this way alone, the pitiable way of primeval animals—in this way alone whole communities could save the poor means to keep soul and body together.'" Yet the war itself was not the worst; the war itself was as nothing! Thoughtlessly speak of the Reconstruction period? To us it was the Re-*de*struction period. Our stable citizenship was disfranchised; late bondsmen, illiterate and gloating with sudden privileges, were vested with unbridled authority; that vandal, the

carpetbagger from the North, and that harpy, the scalawag from the South, united to one heinous end, heaped upon our prostrate and impoverished people indignities and calamities such as few races have ever been forced to endure. The masses in the North, to be sure, could not have been aware of these rapacities, else they had never been permitted to continue. But could the majority of Southerners have been expected to discriminate? Can all be expected, since the scars are still on them, to discriminate yet? The vitriolic spirit of Dixon was the inevitable consequence of the anguish imposed by the war and the unspeakable inhumanity that followed.

The second type, too, has its foundations deep in human nature. It is free from all violent distemper; it is linked with a genial charity and an august forgiveness; but it is haunted by regrets for a cause that it thinks of as lost, and it ceaselessly mourns "That there hath passed away a glory from the earth." Its most outspoken advocate was the late Father Ryan, whose poem of "The Conquered Banner" concludes with the line, "For its people's hopes are dead!" But its chastened and beautiful spirit is subtly and pervasively present in thousands of other personalities that are equally gentle; nor do I think it is absent from Thomas Nelson Page himself. This tendency to idealize a departed condition has commendable aspects, and yet I believe it is dangerous. The objection I bring to it is that its perspective is wrong. It implies the paralysis of hopes destroyed, the inertness of blighted prospects. It cries that at the end of the war the curtain dropped. It tells us that Eden has been left behind. It bids us wander forlornly among the graves of things gone, weeping about the tombstones of memory, benighted and groping amid the shadows of "the days that are no more." It does not sufficiently discern that, though outward forms have perished, the inspiration of a spirit continues; it does not hold forth the assurance that communities, like men,

"May rise on stepping-stones

Of their dead selves to higher things";

nor does it thrill with conviction that, so long as the resources of the section are as one ear of corn where two ought to grow, so long as the needs of the world are unsatisfied, so long as the perfection of the race lies before, the traditions of the South may abide and the vitality of the South know countless resurrections.

If the doctrine of Dixon is that of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, if the attitude of Ryan is pure but pathetically hopeless, no reproach or aspersion can be brought from honest hearts against the spirit of Lee. The golden privilege that awaits the public-spirited man of the South is that of convincing the masses that Lee is the abundant answer to the other two. I have sat in a Southern audience that was violently inflamed by Dixon's play of "The Clansman" and have wondered how that audience would feel if before it could be read some of Lee's letters—how it would feel if confronted with his words: "I have thought from the time of the cessation of hostilities that silence and patience on the part of the South was the true course, and I think so still." I have heard from a hundred standpoints and in a hundred disguises the impossible longings of Ryan expressed and have said in my heart that they were as the borrowed splendors of the moon when compared with Lee's reply to a kinsman who had asked what was left to be done: "You can work for Virginia—to build her up again, to make her great again."

Lee was not deterred by adverse conditions. It is true, perhaps, that no man was ever harassed by more trying and relentless difficulties. Perhaps it is also true that the responsibility would have broken his life had he not found relief in his rides on his war steed, Traveller, in those flashes of tender playfulness that mellowed the dignity of his character, in kindly intercourse with his neighbors, and in the hallowed quiet of the domestic circle. I have shown already how drained and depleted was the conquered South. I ask that you remember, in addition, that at the close of the war Lee was for the first time in his life without an official position, that his estate had been confiscated, that he was a prisoner on parole, and that he was suspected, scanned, and unmercifully assailed from the North. With undaunted fortitude and forbearance he met the issues that the times presented. He counseled patience and submission. He urged economy, insisting that the lavishness of ante-bellum times could no longer be maintained. He encouraged industry. He gave his old soldiers a rallying cry that any brave people should admire: "Tell them they must all set to work, and if they cannot do what they prefer, do what they can." Nor did he stop with mere words. He set the example by accepting the presidency of Washington College. The institution at that time was hampered in finances, it had an

enrollment of but forty, and it was twenty-three miles from a railroad. Yet with it he remained till his death, administering its affairs with prudence, energy, and courage. It is the wisdom of human life to work under limitations, so these be unavoidable and not self-imposed; and never did affliction encounter a worthier opponent than it found in Lee.

Let me state more clearly than I have hitherto done Lee's basic claim on the gratitude of the nation. It rests in the fact that his spirit was essentially creative, that he was no more anxious to reconcile than he was to upbuild. Perchance the assertion sounds strange to those who have heard, time out of mind, that the South, unbendingly arrayed against the innovating forces of the North, stood first of all for conservatism. Let us revise the idea that admits no exception and make current the knowledge that the best men on both sides were gifted with qualities not confined to their section. Even a superficial study of Lee's deportment after the surrender will disclose how flimsy is the argument sometimes leveled at his greatness that his temperament was destructive or, at best, negative. By precept on the right occasions and by practice always, he showed, amid obstacles that might well have appalled, an ardent desire and intention to weld together the sundered purposes of Americanism and to shape and erect something lasting in that "long warfare for the emancipation of mankind." With his restraint and his reverence for the old he combined an animation for the new that had descended as his right from the South of the Revolution—the South of Washington, of Jefferson, and of Marshall. Because he wished above personal advantage to toil constructively for the good of his country, he was not to be tempted from his humble work at Washington College by the most enticing offers of lucrative employment. In answer to one such offer, he gave the slogan of a new era: "I have led the young men of the South in battle; I have seen many of them die on the field; I shall devote my remaining energies to training young men to do their duty in life."

In view of these facts, was not Robert E. Lee a man whom Southerners should emulate and Northerners commend? Is not his example, like the example of Lincoln, too benign for malice to revile it unreprieved? Is not his spirit a majestic possession which our people as a whole should forever cherish?

GARLAND GREEVER.